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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses educational reform as it affects dropouts, minorities, diverse cultures, training programs, and community-based education. Effective dropout-prevention models are presented that address the needs of at-risk populations. The author states that much dropout prevention and reclamation takes place off of school district campuses and suggests that many community-based educational programs are having a significant impact on prevention and recovery. Several programs are highlighted such as Alternative Street Academy, Project Early Outreach, Operation RETAIN (Rescue Educational Training and Initiative Now), Teens for Responsible Behavior, Project Earn and Learn, RETAIN II, Operation Reclaim, Operation Read/Project Citizen, and the Substance Abuse and Gang Intervention Program. Several reasons are attributed to the success of these programs, including offering individualized education; having proper role models; having a culturally, ethnically, bilingually, and socioeconomically sensitive staff; and using individualized services from counseling volunteers, universities and colleges, and the community. Despite these efforts, however, the high dropout rate continues unabated, fueled by financial pressures, teen pregnancies, cultural and ethnic differences, and high unemployment. Financing validated, effective programs is part of the solution recommended. Contains 15 references. (GLR)

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Educational Reform: Dropouts, Culture and Minorities

Implications For Educators

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses educational reform as it affects dropouts, minorities, diverse cultures, training programs, and community based education. Effective models are presented that address the needs of at-risk populations.

Educational Reform: Dropouts, Culture and Minorities

Implications For Educators

The dropout problem has been studied and restudied; searched and researched. It has been empirically studied; theoretically, psychologically, affectively, behaviorally, environmentally, and cognitively studied. The problem persists.

Some authors see the need for "a systematic empirical approach that focuses on proximal classroom variables that may cause or may amplify alienation among at-risk students" (Edmonds, 1986). Other researchers have responded with an enormous amount of designs and models, however, the problem persists.

Reasons for the troublesome dropout rate have been sought by scores of investigators. Richardson et al. (1989) suggest that the typing of students by school resource personnel tremendously affects teacher's perceptions, which, in turn, impacts teacher behaviors toward students. Larkin and Chabay (1989) champions the use of motivating factors to increase cognitive skills. Resnick and Klopfer (1989) suggest peer interaction and the use of "informal" student knowledge to foster critical thought.

We have studied at-risk high school students (Farrell et al., 1988), learning disabled students (Miller et al., 1988); and elementary school students. We have tested hypotheses; defined terms and "labels"; observed classrooms and behaviors; interviewed students, parents, and school personnel; interpreted data; and analyzed models. Still the dropout problem persists.

Denials Escalate Problem

Many school districts label escalated dropout rates, contrary to their in-house figures, as "miscounted, "misinformed" and "miscalculated." However, one need only to look at the increasing number of youths walking the streets during school hours to know that the dropout problem continues to escalate. **The problem will persist as long as we justify and falsify statistics to maintain the status quo or the status quo ante.**

Where do we go from here? Is it still "publish or perish," or do we now move into the arena of "practice or perish?" I agree that educators should study empirically researched models, but they should also analyze other behaviorally- tested and proven-effective models, whether school-based or community-based. Failure to do so will perpetuate a continuing educational problem.

In order to have true educational reform, psychologists, counselors, teachers, administrators and other educators must accept individual behaviors based on individual performance. We can no longer dismiss troublesome behaviors that cannot be boxed, classified, and couched in an empirical design, as "pathological."

I concur with Kagan (1990) who stated, "we now have several decades of demographic and correlational studies that document a clear profile for students at risk." My question is, "how have at-risk students benefitted?" Millions of dollars have funded research, paid for high-salaried administrators who have little or no relevance to targeted populations, and produced study after study. The "old-boy network" has been perpetuated and very little

"educational reform" money has filtered to the students. Consequently, the dropout problem persists.

We continuously empirically study theoretical models tested in structured school environments. However, too often, it appears that other "practitioner" models are not worthy of consideration. For instance, most "educational reform" models shown on television are school district classrooms. In spite of these highly touted classroom reform models, the dropout problem persists.

Until we honestly assess the above issues, **educational reform will continue to be the joke of the century!**

Community-Based Education

I suggest that much dropout prevention and reclamation of education takes place off school district campuses. Many community-based educational programs are making a **significant** impact in dropout prevention and recovery. These programs, however, are media-ignored, financially-starved, and perceived as adversaries rather than educational allies. Since the overall goal of education is to prepare an educated, skill-oriented, competitive citizenry, effective "alternative" educational programs should be given the credence they deserve.

"Alternative" is a derivative of the Latin "alter", meaning the second of two. However, I prefer the common use of the term, meaning one of several possibilities. This use of the term "alternative" places the emphasis on OUTCOME rather than process. In this context, much of the stigma attached to "alternative' is removed.

Instead of engaging in "turf wars", partnerships must be forged between school districts and community-based organizations, between higher education and store-front educational entities, between "intellectual" academia and job-specific training facilities. All must work collaboratively to stem the dropout tide and prepare educated, employable citizens.

One such collaborative effort was the dropout-prevention agreement between the San Bernardino City Unified School District (SBCUSD) and non-profit, community-based Provisional Educational Services, Incorporated (PESI), in San Bernardino, California.

PESI, through its training facility, the Provisional Accelerated Learning (PAL) Center, operated the **Alternative Street Academy (ASA)** in 1990-91. The Academy provided 10 hours of in-class instruction, 10 hours of outside assignments, and counseling to suspended and expulsion-revoked students. Youth who would ordinarily be unsupervised "on-the-streets" were actively engaged in behavioral counseling, and in teacher and computer-assisted learning.

Of 30 enrollees between September 1990 and January 1991, who were pre and post-tested with the Wide Range Achievement Test, one participant maintained grade level, the other enrollees increased their reading and math scores by one to four grade levels. By June 1991, 89 students had enrolled. They were 88% male and 80% minority. These youths, whose behavior warranted suspension or expulsion, had a 90% attendance rate in the ASA program.

Dropout Prevention and Intervention Programs

The **Alternative Street Academy** was only one of several drop-out-prevention, intervention, and recovery programs at the community-based PAL Center.

Project Early Outreach, a Saturday morning counseling and tutorial program for elementary school children, originally funded by the City of San Bernardino for 60 children, enrolled 96 children and established a waiting list of 38 applicants. Subsequent funding from McDonnell Douglas, enrolled 23 students and, again, established a waiting list.

Operation RETAIN (Rescue Educational Training and Initiative Now) provided academic tutoring, computer training, counseling, GED preparation, English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL), and employment skill training for low-income 14 to 21-year-old youth. Funded by the San Bernardino County Private Industry Council (PIC), this program has serviced over 1,200 youth in its seven years of operation. During 1988-89, although originally contracted for 100 youth, 191 were enrolled before cessation of enrollment two months prematurely due to lack of funding. Enrollment was again stopped two months early during 1989-90. In subsequent years, we were instructed to refrain from over-enrolling.

The cultural diversity of the students was especially noteworthy. A March 1990-91 enrollment of 89 participants revealed 15.73% of the students were Caucasian, 16.85% were African-American, 33.71% were Hispanic, 6.74% were Vietnamese, 2.25% were Chinese and 24.72% were Asian and Pacific Islanders.

Teens for Responsible Behavior, a program for male and female teenagers, coordinated by a male, stressed pregnancy prevention and parenting responsibilities.

Project Earn and Learn, an eight-week summer youth employment program, hired 100 low-income youth at minimum wage and placed them on interest and skill-related summer jobs. Funded by the San Bernardino County PIC and Department of Career Training and Development, these 14 to 21-year-olds worked on job sites Monday through Thursday and on Friday they rotated through four classes at California State University at San Bernardino.

RETAIN II, funded by the California State Department of Education offered free computer word-processing, data-entry, GED preparation and academic remediation to eligible 16 to 45 year- old individuals.

Operation Reclaim, a Greater Avenues to Independence (GAIN) welfare reform program, provided adult basic education, GED preparation, counseling and computer skill training to forty recipients of Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

Operation Read/Project Citizen, an adult-literacy and amnesty training program, provided basic remediation to non-readers, non-English speaking, and limited-English-speaking participants. Over 150 participants were served.

Substance Abuse and Gang Intervention Program (SAGIP), a traveling anti-drug/gang/AIDS display featuring SAM (Substance Abuse Mobile) II, in its second year funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources, traveled to 101 sites,

had 76,000 walk-through visitors, and impacted another 300,000 via TV and radio exposure.

Self-Destruct, an anti-gang and drug video, and the anti-drug comic book, **Mighty Medic**, featuring a Black superhero, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, have become very prominent components of the SAM II traveling display. Over 9,970 free copies of Mighty Medic have been distributed.

The PAL Center has also been certified as a California State Department of Education dropout-recovery **SB65 Educational Clinic.**

Community-based Education Plays Vital Role

Performance-proven community-based educational centers play a vital role in dropout prevention and recovery. However, these programs and students are rarely recognized by the educational community for their literacy contributions. Extremely high-risk participants, such as the mother of 12 children who recently attained her GED at the PAL Center, should be highly praised for overcoming multiple barriers to return to school. Participants resist **tremendous** peer pressure to affiliate with gangs, and to engage in drug and crime activity.

The PAL Center is located in a 94% minority neighborhood that is high in crime, high in dropout and unemployment rates, and low in community services and positive modeling. There are three liquor stores and an "adult" night club in the same block. **It is absolutely essential that counseling and positive training is available in these communities.** Mitchem (1990) states:

> Changing demographics will drastically reduce the pool of workers available to support our aging population. . . . In the 1950s, for every American who was retired, there were 17 Americans working to help pay retirement benefits. By 2020 or so, it is going to be two to one. Indeed, by 1992 the ratio will be three to one, with one of those people being a minority. Who is going to pay for the retirees? Today I go into some communities where 80% of blacks, for instance, are receiving some kind of public assistance. . . . Furthermore, despite the average annual operating cost of $20,000 to support one prisoner, we have more African-American males in jail than in college dormitories. Who is going to pay for these two, large dependent populations if current trends stay in place?

Racial and Ethnic Inequities

The disproportionate incarceration of minority juveniles validate the concerns expressed by Mitchem (1990). According to a December 8, 1993 release from the California Office of Criminal Justice Planning, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) found that

* African-American (AA) youth were significantly over-represented at all stages of juvenile justice processing in California.

* Two out of five AA youth have come in contact with the California juvenile justice system (which exceeds national levels).

* AA youth account for 42% of State's incarcerated juvenile populations, although they comprise less than 9% of State's youth population.

* AA youth are 10 times more likely to be sentenced to the California Youth Authority than other youth. A variance was found in the processing of AA youth in the justice system.

* Over 44% of AA youth between the ages of 10-15 were detained by court dispositions compared to 28% of the majority youth.

* 53% of AA youth between the ages of 16-17 were detained by court dispositions and only 32% of the majority youth in the same age group were detained.

* AA youth have higher detention rates, higher sentencing rates, the strongest residual effect, and disparate processing in the juvenile justice system.

* Statewide, 53.4% of high school graduates enroll in college; whereas, only 10.1% of African Americans, and 15.3% of Hispanics are ELIGIBLE to enroll in college.

Only 2.4% of African Americans, and 2.9% of Hispanics <u>actually enroll</u> in college.

<u>Competent Labor vs No Labor</u>

In testimony before the U.S, Subcommittee on Investment Jobs, and Prices of the Joint Economic Committee (Henry, 1988), I stated:

> **My** concern for employment by the year 2000 is not **training** a competent labor force, but rather having a labor force to train. I contend that if the current dropout, drug, and crime rates continue to escalate, by the year 2,000, the majority of our labor force will not BE trainable. They will be illiterate and/or involved in drugs and gang activity."

Five factors that impact the dropout rate were offered during the testimony:

1) Educators under-estimate the importance of culture and socio-economic variables on student behaviors.
2) Inappropriate testing labels categorize and push students out of school, often before they can prove their potential.
3) Too many teachers are glorified baby sitters, classroom discipline is not maintained, and students are not encouraged to set challenging goals.
4) Dropout-prevention monies frequently pay for high-salaried administrators, and only minimal funds filter down to the classrooms.
5) Existing "turf wars" are inappropriate in education. The need is so great that ALL educational entities should utilize ALL available resources to educate the populace.

The testimony also included some very significant data that was analyzed and reported in September 1988. Of 117 PAL Center 14 to 21 year-old participants, 45 were enrolled in the GED program; 8 were in an independent study high school program at The Center; 8 were in adult basic education; 53 graduated and 3 had entered the military. As of December 1988, an additional 6 were high school graduates, 12 received a GED and 3 dropouts had returned to "regular" high school. Through the years, this success has been consistent.

Then and Now

In June 1993, 21 former dropouts received high school diplomas at graduation exercises of the Fontana Unified School District, and three participants received GEDs. Forty-Six of 97 Operation RETAIN participants entered full-time employment.

Eighty-nine (89) high school seniors, who were enrolled in the PAL Center's Educational Talent Search Project, graduated, and 52 of those graduates entered post-secondary institutions. This 58.4% post-secondary enrollment rate compares to a statewide rate of 53.4%, and a region rate of 49%.

The PAL Center

* Hired one-hundred-thirty-three (133) 14 to 21-year-old youths in employment during the summer of 1993.

* From July 1, 1993, to February 1, 1994, through the GAIN (Greater Avenues to Independence) welfare reform program, graduated 6 participants with GEDs, and 9 with ABE (adult basic education) certificates. Eight (8) completed the requirements for a high school diploma and will graduate in June 1994.

* The Training-Internship-Placement (TIP) program, funded in November 1993 for forty (40) 18 to 21-year-old participants, by February 1, 1994, had 31 enrolled, had trained and placed 21 in paid internships, 10 are ready for employment, and youth are enrolling daily.

* Between July 1, 1993 and March 1, 1994, so far this 1993-94 Operation RETAIN program year, 26 18-to-21 year old high-risk, dropout youth have been placed in full-time employment; and, 9 have completed requirements for high school diplomas to be awarded in June.

Success Factors

The successes quoted can be attributed to several reasons, including, but not limited to

1) individualized education where each student enters tabula rasa;
2) a PAL Center staff that is genuinely, culturally, ethnically, bi-lingually and socio-economically sensitive;
3) role-modeling a key component. Students are more effective when they feel a sense of acceptance and belonging, whether in elementary, secondary or college institutions. A frustrated graduate student related during a research study: "What I have found to be my biggest problem is a lack of support from any particular professor. There is no one I can really consider my mentor. I would like the help of someone who really believes in me and is willing to invest and share his or her time" (Henry, 1985);
4) counseling volunteers, from universities, colleges, and the community, who helped provide individualized services.

Approximately 60% of PAL Center participants have had some current or past gang involvement. It is significant to note that

we experience extreme difficulty securing employment for former gang members, in spite of the fact they were model students. If we truly advocate reform, help should readily be available to those youths who wish to salvage their lives.

> We must dwell on the strengths of each individual. Too often overlooked is the fact that students are more aware of their shortcomings than are those people who constantly allude to these deficiencies. The whole life of most students is a continuous sensitivity session. We do not need to make them aware of what they are; rather, we must make them aware of what they can be. (Henry, 1979)

Community Sites

Community-based educational programs provide excellent opportunities for counselor trainees to get hands-on experience with at-risk students of diverse cultures. The School of Education at California State University scheduled the Multicultural Counseling class at the community-based PAL Center during the Summer and Fall quarters. The first half of the class period was devoted to counseling and tutoring 30 community youth who came for services Wednesday evening. This programmatic format, in a 94% minority neighborhood, proved to be an invaluable experience for both university students and community youth.

I do not share the opinion of researchers (i.e. Toby, 1989) that propose letting potential dropouts leave school, without intervention, and experience the outside world for themselves. Too

often, those dropouts return to schools with vengeance (U.S. News, 1993).

Prevention, intervention, and recovery services are essential because of the unwarranted circumstances of many dropouts. Additionally, it is more cost effective to finance prevention rather than spend the $10 billion dollars needed to build prisons to accommodate the predicted 225,000 inmates by June 30, 2000 in California alone. This also assumes the facilities will be at 125% of capacity, according to the California State Department of Finance. As of April 17, 1991, the California State Department of Corrections reported the 21-prison system held 100,157 inmates - four times more than it did 10 years earlier.

No More Games, Please

A preponderance of literature, research studies, task forces, synthesis of knowledge, comprehensive discussions of the dropout problem, and getting tough with truants have failed to stem the dropout tide.

The national education goals set forth by President Bush and the nation's governors, such as the ambitious goal 2: "By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%" (USDE, 1991) are not synchronized with the reality of our social systems.

Study after study has shown that financial pressures, teen pregnancies, high poverty and unemployment rates, cultural and ethnic differences and inability to function in highly structured environments significantly contribute to the dropout rate. Reform

measures, however, have been to pour money into the same environment which failed students in the first place. In addition, too often, reform monies are utilized to pay high-salaried administrators and consultants to further "study" the problem.

Funded public hearings are held by individuals who have no relevance to the problem. "Reform" programs are administrated by appointed individuals whose only knowledge is gleaned from attending conferences and reading research. Too often the "task force" for dropout prevention does not include the dropout, or equitable percentage of minority populations who comprise the largest proportion of dropouts.

"Experts" concede that current educational reform, and programs designed to break the cycle are not working. President George Bush revealed a "sweeping, new and innovative educational program" that calls for

1) schools of choice - the old freedom of choice schools of the 1960s, but now private schools will be subsidized by public taxes;
2) standardized national testing - which has been a part of the educational system as long as I can remember, and is partly responsible for many of the dropouts; and
3) experimental schools - the old segregated schools to research what we already know.

I see nothing innovative in the plan. We will again pour money into a bottomless pit and then blame the victims for ineffective programs designed by paper-pushing decision makers.

Unfortunately, President Bill Clinton's administration is following the same unrealistic Education 2000 Goals established by President Bush.

Educational reform is possible, but not under current constructs. Decision-makers must come from a cross-section of socio-economic strata, culture, ethnic, and academic levels. Decisions should also have input from persons who have actually experienced the problems considered.

Until some of the issues discussed in this article are sincerely assessed and addressed; until we move from rhetoric and research to practice and implementation; until educational training programs include community "hands-on" experience with at-risk populations; and, until we finance validated effective programs, whether school or community-based, educational reform will be a painful joke. The big chess game, that uses youth and underclass populations as experimental pawns, will continue to be played by America's educators.

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